

SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF DATANG IN INDONESIAN¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

When Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* was published, a grammar was considered to have a tripartite arrangement: the phrase structure, the transformational structure, and the morphophonemics (p. 46). Semantics at that time was placed outside the grammar and was considered harmful to linguistics. Two years earlier he said that "if it can be shown that meaning and related notions do play a central role in linguistic analysis, then its results and conclusions become subject to all of the doubts and obscurities that plague the study of meaning, and a serious blow is struck at the foundations of linguistic theory" (Chomsky, 1955, p. 141). As the time passed, however, generative grammarians began to feel that the elimination of meaning from linguistic analysis became more and more impossible. Katz and Fodor (1963) presented a detailed study of semantic theory which has a significant role in the development of the present generative grammar. This theory was later integrated into a more comprehensive work (Katz and Postal, 1964) where a grammar was then viewed as consisting of three components: syntactic, phonological, and semantic. It was later "standardised" with the appearance of Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. One characteristic that the above works share is that they hold syntax to be central and the other two components peripheral.

At the time when *Aspects* was published, George Lakoff finished his dissertation which later became known as *Irregularity in Syntax*. Although it was originally intended as a minor revision to *Aspects*, it soon became apparent that it dealt with fundamental issues that at the end led to the rejection of syntax and semantics as two separate entities. One logical conclusion from this indifferentiation is the merging

of deep structures with semantic representations. Lakoff's approach simplifies the base, as many of the problems are now handled transformationally.

Another revision to the standard theory, which again was originally minor at the beginning, was developed by Fillmore (1968). In his pursuit of a deeper deep structure, he introduced a concept known as case within the base component. In this model a sentence is viewed as consisting of a Modality (M) and a Proposition (P), the former dealing with sentence modalities such as negation, mood, and aspects, and the latter "a tenseless set of relationships involving verbs and nouns" (p. 23). Central to this "case grammar" are the roles of the cases which determine the selection of the verb within a sentence.

As this model gained a great number of followers, it also showed an inadequacy to handle certain problems (Huddleston, 1970). This prompted Fillmore to revise his theory which resulted in a model substantially different from his previous one (Fillmore, 1971). The new model did not have a modality and a proposition, but, instead, "a predicator in construction with one or more entities each of these related to the predicator in one of the semantic functions known as (deep structure) cases" (p. 4). Since a predicator is mostly, although not always, a verb, his recent model can, therefore, be viewed as consisting of a verb plus a set of nouns each with its own case marker.² The fact that he does not mention the verb-case relationship compels me to assume that it is still the array of cases which determines the choice of the verb.

Although it is clear from the foregoing analysis that the role of semantics in linguistic theory is being given more serious thought than before, the real breakthrough in the use of semantics as a theoretical foundation comes from a man who was reared in the structuralist tradition - Wallace Chafe. He believes that since the function of language is to relate meaning to sound, he assumes that "at the heart of an adequate theory of language must be an adequate theory of semantic structure" (Chafe, 1971, p. 11). He further assumes that "the total human conceptual universe is dichotomized initially into two major areas" (p. 96), that is, the area of the verb, which embraces states and events, and the area of the noun, which embraces things. Contrary to the practice followed by some grammarians, such as Fillmore, Chafe considers the verb as central, and the noun peripheral. This necessarily means that it is the verb which determines what noun or nouns may or must co-occur, and not the reverse.

The way this semanticist theory operates can be summarised as follows: At the bottom of the whole matter is a semantic structure in which configurations of meanings are to be found. Through post-semantic processes,

which are similar to transformations, the configurations are transformed into a series of post-semantic representations which eventually lead to a surface structure. In order to reach the phonetic structure, the surface structure has yet to be subjected to several processes. This includes the symbolisation processes which convert the still semantically oriented surface structure into its underlying phonological structure. After undergoing a series of phonological processes, the surface structure will then appear in its phonetic form. See Figure 1 (simplified).

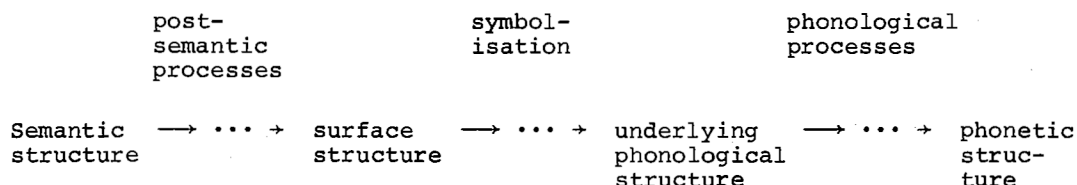


FIGURE 1

Each verb and noun under consideration is specified in terms of three semantic units: selectional, lexical, and inflectional. A selectional unit is intended to narrow down the areas of conceptual space. For a verb this includes state, process, action, and ambient. For a noun the selectional unit consists of count, potent, animate, human, unique, and feminine. After a noun or a verb has been selectionally specified, it reaches a point where no further specification is possible. For units of this kind the term lexical unit is used which appears ordinarily in the form of a root. The only specification a lexical unit may undergo is through derivation which includes among other things relative, inchoative, causative, for a verb, and countiser, anthropomorphiser, defeminiser for a noun.³ The last semantic units are inflectional, which for a verb includes generic, perfective, progressive, past, obligational, etc. For a noun it may consist of units such as definite, generic, plural, unique, etc. In addition to these, Chafe postulates another inflectional unit which he calls "new". He assumes that when two persons are communicating, some of the information being communicated is new, and that there is at least one item which is old. The new information is being introduced to the hearer's mind for the first time, while the old information is shared, or assumed to be shared, by the speaker and the hearer.

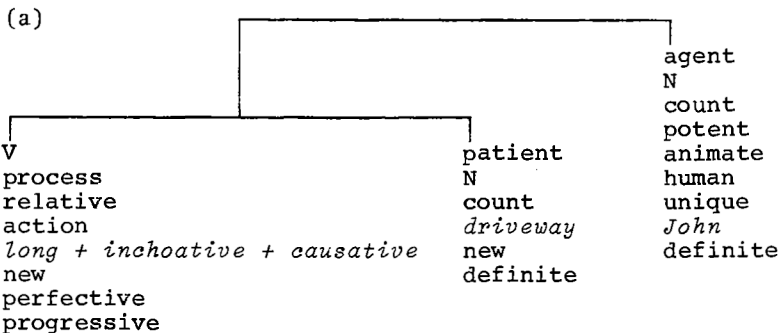
The centrality of the verb within a sentence brings about the verb-noun relations of the following types: patient, agent, experiencer, beneficiary, instrument, complement, and location. Unless a verb is specified as ambient, which indicates that the state is an all-encompassing

state with no reference to a particular thing within the environment, every sentence must have either a patient, an agent, or both. The occurrence of an instrument noun depends on the presence of an action-process verb. The other six are determined by the presence of a certain set of selectional units within the verb.

Applying these semantic units to the sentence

(1) *John has been lengthening the driveway.*

Chafe comes up with the following semantic structure (p. 240):



where the italicised elements are lexical units and those above and below them represent the selectional and inflectional units respectively.

In order to bring (a) to surface structure, a series of post-semantic processes must be applied. This involves subject and object formations, agreement, literalisation, linearisation, and deletions of various kind. After phonological processes have been utilised, (a) appears in the phonetic form of (1).

2. CENTRALITY OF THE VERB

This paper is an attempt to apply Chafe's theory of language. There are two main reasons why this particular theory is adopted. First, as a native speaker of Indonesian, I feel that using case array the way Fillmore does to determine what verb can or must occur in a sentence is counter-intuitive.⁴ If a sentence such as

(2) **Dia memarahi patung itu*
he angry statue the

is to have a meaning at all, the possible interpretation would be to consider *patung itu* as animate, and not to assign a unique meaning to the verb *memarahi*. In this way, (2) means something like '*He is angry with the statue.*' This particularly becomes more obvious if we consider the whole verb set, because what determine the meaning of a sentence in